



11-15-2002

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Recommended Citation

Wheeler, Gerald R. (2002) "Steel Garden," *Westview*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 1 , Article 18.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol22/iss1/18>

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Steel Garden

by Gerald R. Wheeler

Dried blood-colored iron shell, door sagging on wire hinge (driver's door missing), broken headlines a blank stare, front seat exploding springs, instrument panel—cracked glass-covered faded numbers & dead gauges that looked like an abstract painting in noon glare. Steering wheel turned toward past, floorboard weed bed, pine sapling shifting toward a green horizon. I saw the hulk of the pickup while hiking in the hill country near Austin. 5 minutes later, I was beckoned to a barn that resembled a junkyard garage reeking of gasoline & oil. Hardly space to walk. Dirt floor strewn with rusty fenders, radiators, pistons, axles, gears & bumpers. I was knocked down by lathes & engine block suspended on chain from ceiling. Stumbled over welding tanks & torches. Shot by paint guns. I scanned shelves lined with oil cans, stacks of manuals, tools, solvent & rags. I wandered outside behind the barn. Suddenly a stranger materialized & waved his arm like a wand. Magically, vintaged Cadillacs, Buicks & Chevys appeared among trees. A bullet-riddled sedan with a grill big as whale teeth charged out of tall grass. I gazed at hoods gleaming silver wing ornaments, sleek metallic black bodies that had dorsal fins, two-tone torsos & broad shoulders & wrap-around windshields wearing sun visors, & spare white-walls bolted to trunks. I saw a woody lugging a surfboard, a 1921 customized Ford that surely was the first SUV & Dodge with a rumble seat occupied by a naked mannequin. The stranger squinted, "People come from all over the world to see my collection. Even Hollywood moguls offer to buy them for parts in movies. But I always tell 'em, 'My flowers never leave the garden.'"



Photo by Gerald R. Wheeler

